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# Desert

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## Chapter 1 by Beth Payne

One could suppose that the irregular timing at which the clock ticked along was an obvious indicator of the alien world they had been inhabiting – one who had no awareness that the clock was, in fact, ticking in time, and that the furthermore obvious reason they misheard this ticking was that it was not theirs to hear correctly. Irritable at the best of times, Thomas had spent the vast majority of his waiting period pacing; an act that surely achieved nothing but irritation of the other man stood in the much too small room. Klaus, although not patient, felt he should act as such, if anything as a good example to his younger brother; even when the two were stuck in such a dire situation as their current one, he knew his place. Besides, he had little desire to calm his brother when his mind was already considering more pressing matters, for example, how to escape this realm the two had been so suddenly moved to.

For the pair, however, escape was nigh. The sun dawned on the horizon of the great wastelands, sand dunes spanning as far as the eye could see, the great expanse intimidating upon first glance - and likely upon all to follow. All one had to do, however, to glimpse civilisation, was turn precisely one-hundred and eighty degrees from the view that now faced the two men, trapped in their glass room: there lay the glittering heights of Neir, the city of the wasteland. A great

place, once decrepit and exhausted of all resources, the Almasa family had taken control not many years ago, turning their gr...

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horizons of the wasteland

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Klaus was not an unintelligent man, by any means. Many years spent in the libraries of his parents' house ensured his extensive knowledge was enough to at least allow his basic comprehension of the situation; the clock was not, after all, of Geodenian make. He knew it was from the wastelands – the cursed lands of the East that the prosperous Westerners daren't speak of. The Easterners, of course, ruled in a dictatorial manner by the iron fist of the Abazea monarchy, had no knowledge of the West; they were slaves, purchased in various illicit deals to work for the new empire, the new kingdom of the East.

It was for this reason that those who passed the glass box, those who heard the aggravated footsteps of Thomas, those who ran in haste into the desert, did not notice the pair. The door to the outside world was not sealed, Klaus had realised – after Thomas had so brutishly thumped on the wall of the box, it had opened a crack, sand grains pouring onto the otherwise pristine floor. By this point, Thomas was over his impatience, rather brooding in the corner, left waiting for his brother to strategise their escape.

Fortunately for him, Klaus was merely biding his time. He was aware of the work pattern of the citizens of Neir, the morning rush to harvest the skin shed by snakes during the seventy-hour night, and aware that, although not educated, the slaves of the East were not dumb. Had they chosen to leave at that point, they surely would have been noticed, and that would have caused unnecessary trouble. It took only a few minutes for Klaus to stand from where he had been sat, approach the door, and push it further ajar, gesturing towards his brother.

"We should leave while we can, Thomas."

One would think it unusual that, as Thomas stepped from the door to join his brother in the sand, that as the door closed and the glass box was enveloped in stifling silence, the clock stopped ticking.

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